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Diana T Fritz 05/24/2007 04:42:27 PM From DB/Inbox: Search Results

Cable  
Text:

CONFIDENTIAL

SIPDIS  
TELEGRAM

March 29, 2003

To: No Action Addressee  
Action: Unknown  
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 1482 - UNKNOWN)  
TAGS: PREL, OPRC, OIIP, KPAO, KWWW  
Captions: None  
Subject: UAE STATE-OWNED MEDIA'S PORTRAYAL OF THE WAR  
Ref: None

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 01482

SIPDIS  
CXABU:  
ACTION: POL  
INFO: DCM P/M ECON RSO AMB

DISSEMINATION: POL  
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MMWAHBA  
DRAFTED: PAO:KVANDEVATE  
CLEARED: POL:STW

VZCZCADI730  
OO RUEHC RUCNRAQ RUEKJCS RUCAACC RHEHNSC  
DE RUEHAD #1482/01 0881143  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 291143Z MAR 03  
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9118  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUCAACC/USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 001482

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR IRAQ PD TASK FORCE, NEA/ARP AND NEA/PPD  
NSC FOR MDUNNE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/29/08  
TAGS: PREL OPRC OIIP KPAO KWWW TC  
SUBJECT: UAE STATE-OWNED MEDIA'S PORTRAYAL OF THE WAR

REF: STATE 81604

11. (U) This cable is classified by Ambassador  
Marcelle Wahba for Reasons 1.5(B) and (D).

12. (C) SUMMARY: War coverage dominates most UAE  
print and electronic media, whether state-owned or  
private. Because of the federal structure of the UAE,  
virtually all state-owned media are owned by the  
governments of the individual emirates, not by the UAE  
federal government. On balance so far, UAE state-  
owned media have sought to strike a balance between  
the anti-war sentiments of the population and the  
danger of losing their audience and market share.

While they have occasionally crossed the line of what is deemed acceptable by U.S. standards, there is not a pattern of incitement. The star to date has been Abu Dhabi Television, which has stolen the show from Al-Jazeera in war coverage, and which is making a major effort to counter the more strident tone of other UAE media. The other state-owned media outlets are far less influential. END SUMMARY.

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Ownership  
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¶13. (C) Except for the Emirates News Agency, which reports to the federal Ministry of Information, state-owned media organizations in the UAE are owned by individual emirates, the leadership of which loosely determines their editorial direction and tone of reporting. State-owned media outlets are:

-- Federal: Emirates News Agency (WAM), the government wire service, which provides coverage of local and government news to all media outlets in the UAE. WAM is closely controlled by the Ministry of Information and its head Ibrahim Al-Abed reports direct to the Minister. It controls indirectly, through its content and other mechanisms, the tone of reporting in UAE media, even privately owned ones.

-- Abu Dhabi Emirate: Emirates Media Incorporated (EMI), majority-owned by the government of Abu Dhabi Emirate; comprising Abu Dhabi Television (with two channels), Abu Dhabi Radio, Al-Ittihad Arabic-language daily, and several magazines. EMI comes under the direction of the Ministry of Information, which is headed by Shaykh Abdulla Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, UAE Minister of Information and Culture and son of UAE President Shaykh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan.

-- Dubai Emirate: Dubai Information Department, a part of the government of Dubai Emirate, oversees Dubai Radio and Television (four channels) and Al-Bayan Arabic-language daily.

-- Sharjah Emirate: Sharjah Television (one satellite channel) and Radio are owned by the government of Sharjah Emirate.

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Abu Dhabi TV Moves Aggressively to Counter Al-Jazeera  
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¶14. (C) Of all these outlets, by far the most influential is Abu Dhabi Television (ADTV). From long before the outbreak of hostilities, ADTV sought to position itself in the forefront, aggressively seeking out cooperative arrangements with other media outlets to share footage and equipment, and requesting from the USG and UK that its reporters be embedded with front-line units to get accurate coverage. Since the war began, MinInfo Shaykh Abdulla Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan has taken a lead role in pushing the station to the forefront of war coverage and in seeking to use it to counter the negative and distorted coverage purveyed by Al-Jazeera. He monitors news coverage around the clock, contacting the U.S. Ambassador when ADTV's reporters are not getting needed access or footage, and emphasizing the importance he and the UAE place on achieving moderate balanced coverage. The results have been excellent; ADTV has gained audience throughout the region at the expense of Al-Jazeera; its feed is being carried by news outlets worldwide, and its reporting from Baghdad is essential now that CNN is no longer there.

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Competition is Stiff  
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¶ 15. (C) Although ADTV has, according to many of our contacts, moved up into a lead position, deft maneuvering is required to stay there lest its audience defect to one of the many alternatives now available to UAE viewers, especially Al-Jazeera and Dubai-based, privately-owned Al-Arabiyya. ADTV is trying hard to retain the sympathies, and therefore attention, of its audience; its news reports, while balanced, are interspersed with images of Iraqi casualties, interviews with commentators critical of the war, etc. When it was granted an interview with SecState Powell, the station ran the interview in full, but followed it with a 20-minute interview with Arab League SecGen Amr Moussa in which he strongly condemned the war.

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A Cautionary Tale  
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¶ 16. (C) Since the conflict began, Al-Ittihad Arabic-language daily (owned by the government of Abu Dhabi Emirate) has also tried to provide a moderate counterbalance to the strident reporting of private newspapers such as Sharjah-based Al-Khaleej Arabic-language daily, which carried lurid photos of Iraqi civilian casualties and numerous editorials and op-eds denouncing the war and U.S. foreign policy generally. The results have been disastrous; Al-Ittihad's distributor called the editor last week to inform him that sales had plummeted to all-time lows and no one was buying the paper. (Circulation is 45,000 in good times). As a result, the coverage in Al-Ittihad has turned slightly more negative and war-focused, though it is still well within the bounds of acceptable and it gives ample coverage to statements of USG officials, CENTCOM briefings, and commentators both for and against the war.

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Dubai  
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¶ 17. (C) Although Dubai Television (DTV) has four satellite channels, its influence is largely confined to Dubai and the UAE. It strives to be balanced in reporting, though it has given substantial airtime to those with anti-war views. Program Director Nasib Bitar told Post that DTV is "trying hard to be as objective as we can, so as not to incite people's feelings and to report objectively." The difficulties of balancing good reporting with popular sentiments, however, are illustrated by an op-ed in Dubai-based Al-Bayan Arabic-daily on 3/29, in which UAE columnist Maryam Al-Numaymi writes: "The objectivity of which our information media are so proud today in covering the war in Iraq is a sign of weakness to be held against them, not something deserving praise and esteem." Al-Bayan's soft-news supplement on 3/29 was devoted mostly to opinion pieces critical of the war, many of them taken from western newspapers. Al-Bayan's war coverage is generally factual, though like the private press, it occasionally headlines statements by Iraqi officials as fact rather than allegations, noting their attribution within the body of the article.

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Sharjah  
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¶ 18. (C) Sharjah TV's one channel, which usually focuses on local events and talk shows with a religious focus, has in the last two weeks carried more news and talk shows focusing on analysis of the war and local opposition to it. Its coverage has occasionally crossed the bounds of the acceptable; for

example, it refers to the US as "invaders" (Arabic "ghuzat"). Sharjah TV's audience is very limited. Post is not able to monitor it consistently because of the number of media outlets here.

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Widening the Gap  
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**¶9. (C) COMMENT:** In our conversations with both journalists and officials, we hear repeatedly the comment that this war is widening the gap between the UAE government and the people, and that attempts to control the media illustrate how wide the gap has grown and the discomfort of the UAE leadership in dealing with it. State-owned media are attempting to bridge this gap by focusing on images of the suffering of Iraqi civilians, anti-war demonstrations in other countries (there have been very few here), and covering local fund-raising campaigns for humanitarian aid for the Iraqis. They also run numerous wire service reports and commentaries from the western press critical of the war and U.S. policy in the region. They walk a fine line between reflecting popular feelings about the war and alienating their audiences completely. Just how difficult this is, is illustrated by a story we heard from the head of the Emirates News Agency. He was called last week by MinInfo Shaykh Abdulla, who asked him how to get the newspapers to tone down their coverage of the conflict so that it would not incite popular feeling. (He volunteered with alacrity that the Undersecretary of the Ministry do this, not him.) Given the difficulty the government already faces in containing popular anger about the war, as well as its efforts to keep coverage within the pale, any further attempt to restrict media coverage may be unwelcome.

WAHBA